

Curious collage shows rhino horns are shrinking due to the impact of hunting

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A recent study claims that the horns of rhinoceroses may have become smaller over time due to the impact of hunting.



[Ref: The Hindu]

Major Highlights:

- Rhinos have long been **hunted for their horns**, which are highly valued in some cultures.
- The five surviving rhino species are still threatened by **habitat loss and hunting**.
- The study found that the **rate of decline** in horn length was **highest in the critically-endangered Sumatran rhino** and **lowest in the white rhino of Africa**, which is the most commonly found species both in the wild and in captivity.

Rhinos:

- There are **five rhino species globally** namely, Black, White, Sumatran, Javan and Great One Horned Rhino or Indian Rhino, out of which black, Javan, and Sumatran—are critically endangered.

White Rhinos:

- Here "**white**" is said to be a misinterpretation of the **Afrikaans word wyd**, meaning wide, referring to its **wide mouth used for grazing**.
- It is the **largest and heaviest extant species** and the **most social of all rhino species**.
- The white rhinoceros consists of two subspecies: the southern white rhinoceros and the much rarer northern white rhinoceros.
- **IUCN Status:** Near Threatened.
 - Researchers have created an embryo of the northern white rhino by using In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) process.

Javan rhinos:

- These are rare rhinos, **found in small numbers only in one national park** on the northern tip of

the Indonesian island of Java and **no individuals in captivity**.

- They are **also known** as **lesser one horned rhino**.

- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered

Sumatran rhinoceros:

- Sumatran rhino is the **smallest rhinoceros** among the 5 extant species.
 - They are also known as the hairy rhinoceros or Asian two-horned rhinoceros.
- They inhabit in the **rainforests, swamps, and cloud forests in India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia**.
- The Sumatran rhino is the **most vocal and mostly solitary animal** except for courtship and offspring-rearing. IUCN Red List Status:
- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered.
 - It has gone extinct in Malaysia.

Indian Rhinos:

- The greater one-horned rhinoceros or great Indian rhinoceros, is a rhinoceros species **native to the Indian subcontinent**.
- They are **grazers** as their diet consists almost entirely of grasses.
- **Kaziranga National Park in Assam** houses the **largest number** of Indian rhinos whereas, **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary** in Assam has the **highest density** of the animal.
- Among terrestrial land mammals native to Asia, Indian rhinos are second in size only to the Asian elephant and the second-largest living rhinoceros, behind only the white rhinoceros.
- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- **CITES:** Appendix I
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I.

Black Rhinos:

- Black rhinos are **browsers rather than grazers**, and their pointed lip helps them feed on leaves from bushes and trees.
- They have **two horns**, and **occasionally a third**, small posterior horn.
- They are found only in Africa.
 - As per a documentation from the World Bank, Black rhino numbers have dropped to about 2,600 which once may have been as high as 850,000.
- **IUCN Status:** Critically endangered.

Conservation Measures:

- International trade in rhino horn has been banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), smuggling and illegal trade remains high.
- There are successful conservation efforts that have led to an increase in the number of Indian rhinos, from around 200 at the turn of the 20th century to around 3,700 at present.
 - The IUCN status of greater one-horned rhino improved from endangered to vulnerable following significant population increases.
- The World Bank has decided to issue **Rhino bonds** for the conservation of black Rhinos.

The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019:

- The **five rhino range nations**, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia, **signed the declaration** for the conservation and protection of the species.

Indian Rhino Vision 2020:

- The program was launched in 2005.
- **Aim:** To attain a wild population of at least 3,000 greater one-horned rhinos spread over seven protected areas in the Indian state of Assam by the year 2020.
- **Translocations** are the backbone of the IRV 2020 program.
- Potential rhino habitat areas identified viz. Manas NP, Dibru Saikhowa WLS, Laokhowa-Bura Chapori WLS with a viable population of rhino through translocations from Kaziranga NP & Pobitora WLS.
 - **Manas National Park** was selected as the **first site for translocation of rhinos**.

National Rhino Conservation Strategy:

- It was launched in 2019 to **conserve the greater one-horned rhinoceros**.

The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) began a **project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos** in the country.